



February 16, 2017

Appropriations Committee Public Hearing

RE: Governor's Budget Recommendation to Eliminate the Connecticut Psychology Internship Program

Dear Chairs Olsten, Formica and Walker, and members of the Appropriations Committee:

The Connecticut Psychological Association (CPA) **strongly opposes the Governor's Budget Recommendation to eliminate the Connecticut Psychology Internship Program (CPIP)** as of September 2017. The Connecticut Valley Psychology Internship began in 1947, and for the past seventy (70) years has provided high quality behavioral health evaluation and treatment services to some of Connecticut's most needy and vulnerable citizens. The CPIP, and the psychologists trained through the program, play an important role in meeting mental health needs in Connecticut. The CPIP and can be maintained through planning that reduces the cost of the internship.

The CPIP clearly supports DMHAS's stated strategic improvement goals and objectives for 2016-2018; specifically, "Goal 1. Improve Quality of Services and Supports" and "Goal 3. Develop Workforce across the System of Care". The quality improvement goal of using data and informatics to promote continuous quality improvement and the delivery of person-centered, evidence-based care is a goal that psychologists are uniquely trained to help accomplish. As an APA-accredited training program, the CPIP is well established in the development, hiring and retention of quality staff, helping to align training resources with current needs and strategic priorities, and the development of supervision infrastructure.

Patients in Middlesex County with serious mental illness who do not have private insurance and cannot afford to pay out of pocket have been provided access to publicly insured care as a direct result of the internship program.

The internship program has also been an important training ground for scores of psychologists who have practiced, and continue to practice, in the state over the past several decades. Psychologists provide services and leadership that are integral to high quality mental health care in Connecticut. CPIP has been an entryway to state service for many psychologists, and the work of psychology interns is a resource that enhances



the care provided at River Valley Services, Whiting, and Blue Hills. Through the provision of direct care and training, the internship program has continued to be a critical factor in providing access to behavioral health services in Connecticut.

Currently, the internship consists of three interns who are primarily based at River Valley Services (RVS) with weekly rotations at Whiting Forensic and Blue Hills Alcohol and Substance Abuse Program. These interns, after completing at least four years of graduate training, including supervised assessment and therapy experience, spend a full year providing services at RVS and on their rotations. During their training, interns complete up to thirty (30) comprehensive intake assessments a year, enabling RVS to reduce client waiting time and admit clients promptly to the appropriate level of care.

In addition, psychology interns bring their specialized doctoral training to provide *research* for DMHAS, *detailed intake assessments*, as well as *comprehensive psychological evaluations* for many patients throughout the year, a role which cannot be filled by non-psychologists. These intake assessments and evaluations serve as the 'backbones' of interdisciplinary treatment planning for each new client assessed. Psychology intern intake assessments provide diagnostic information as well as recommendations for treatment planning, which saves time for treatment teams and helps them to provide more targeted and effective services.

Psychology interns also provide treatment for individuals who meet criteria as 'severe and persistently mentally ill', and play an important role on clinical teams offering evidence-based psychotherapeutic treatment for people who may be struggling with complex and debilitating psychiatric symptoms, trauma, situational stressors, losses, or recent loss of functioning.

As of 2013, there were forty-nine (49) state-funded APA-Accredited internship sites across the United States, with a total of 201 interns. The Connecticut Psychology Internship Program (CPIP) was the first of its kind, and has been a respected training program during its lifetime.

The CPIP internship serves a unique and important role in training psychologists in community mental health and the accompanying socioeconomic and racial diversity issues. Connecticut has been a national leader in public mental health delivery. The elimination of doctoral-level training as a part of this system would signal the decline of this important role, if not a devaluation of mental health care in Connecticut.

The loss of such a critical training program will not only have a direct effect on behavioral health services at River Valley Services and in the Middlesex County community, but it will also have a ripple effect throughout the behavioral healthcare system in Connecticut for years to come. Internship tends to ground trainees in a



geographic location, because of both trainees' beginning to foster professional contacts, as well as the convenience of not having to relocate for post-graduate training and work. Psychologists who train through the CPIP internship program tend to remain in Connecticut afterwards, whereas those who leave for an out-of-state internship are less likely to return to the state. A survey which was the result of a collaboration between the APA Education Directorate and the American Psychological Association of Graduate Students (APAGS) found that approximately 56% of interns remain and practice in the state after graduation.

Eliminating a key APA accredited psychology training program will decrease the supply of psychologists who provide quality behavioral health services in Connecticut. A great many psychologists currently practicing in Connecticut are alumni of, or previous supervisors within, the CPIP internship program. Historically, alumni of the CPIP have held leadership positions in Connecticut's behavioral health treatment programs, as well as within DMHAS, and even earlier in the former Department of Mental Health. The CPIP has served as a reason for psychologists-in-training to move to, and continue to practice in, Connecticut. When considering the many key roles fulfilled within the state's mental health system (including public and private treatment systems, universities and research institutions, as well as within governmental institutions) by psychologists trained through the internship, access to quality behavioral health services will be significantly negatively affected.

The Connecticut Psychological Association respectfully requests that you oppose the Governor's Budget recommendation to eliminate the Connecticut Psychology Internship Program. Thank you for your time and consideration.

Sincerely,

Christopher S. Rigling, Psy.D.
CPA President

Miki Lasher, Ph.D.
CPA Past-President

Traci Cipriano, JD, PhD
CPA Director of Professional Affairs

Anne Klee, Ph.D.
CPA Federal Advocacy Coordinator